

The Midland

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The Acolyte

By JULIA COOLEY

I once held place within your thought
Where now are other shrines.
But I could see such treason wrought,
And ask no other signs,

If I might know that in your heart
You visit memory,
And sometimes dream and fare apart
To that old shrine of me.

The Golden Dawn Time

By NELSON ANTRIM CRAWFORD

I. OF GEECHE MANITO-AH, THE GOOD GOD, AND OF THE MAKING OF THE ANCESTRAL ANIMALS

It is told that in the long ago, when there were no men or beasts or birds in the world, Geeche Manito-ah, the good god, lived in a thick birchen forest on an island far out in the twilight sea. The trees of that forest were green all the year round, wherefore it was called the Wood of the Green Branches. Springs and brooks and little lakes were in that forest, and about them grew bushes with brown nuts, and great red berries that never dried or withered; yea, it was so, that whenever the good god plucked a nut or a berry to eat, two more grew in its stead.

In the midst of the garden, beside a clear lake, there burned ever a great campfire. As yet there was no light from the sky, so the campfire lighted the Wood of the Green Branches with happy twilight, such as the warrior loves when he returns home from the battle and kneels down to smoke his pipe in the silence.

Through the streams and the lakes of his forest did Geeche Manito-ah speed to and fro in his birchbark canoe. Between the trees and through the bushes he ran swiftly and grew weary never.

Yet Geeche Manito-ah was not content, for there were no buffaloes to hunt by day, neither fish to spear by night. So one morning, while the dew was still crystal upon the green leaves, he rose and stood before the great campfire in the innermost part of the forest. And, because he was not content, he cried out, and his cry was ten thousand times louder than the cry of the deer when it is wounded by the feather-bound arrow. So loud was the cry of the Manito-ah that every dewdrop fell from every leaf in the garden, and the sea was shaken and swirled in white foam about the shore of the island. The smoke of the campfire rose in a black cloud; for a long time Geeche Manito-ah watched it.

Suddenly the smoke stood still. Geeche Manito-ah looked at it more closely. Still looking backward at the unmoving smoke, he ran quickly to the shore of the lake. He grasped in his hands a great wet lump of clay. Turning again toward the campfire, he laid the lump of clay before him on the ground. Then he knelt before it, and moulded it, and rubbed it smooth with the palms of his hands; and ever he watched the unmoving smoke. Thus for a long time he labored, and, when finally he arose and looked upon his work, he had made the image of a fox.

Speedily the smoke began to change again, and Geeche Manito-ah watched it. It stood still. Quickly the Manito-ah gathered in his hands another lump of clay, and laid it before him on the ground. Then he knelt before the lump of clay, and moulded it,

and rubbed it smooth with the palms of his hands; and ever he watched the unmoving smoke. Thus for a long time he labored, and, when finally he arose and looked upon his work, he had made the image of an eagle.

Once more did the smoke begin to move. Once more did the good god watch it. It stood still. Right quickly Geeche Manito-ah gathered in his hands still another great lump of clay, and laid it before him on the ground. Then he knelt before the lump of clay, and moulded it, and rubbed it smooth with the palms of his hands; and ever he watched the unmoving smoke. Thus for a long time he labored, and, when finally he arose and looked upon his work, he had made the image of a bear.

Thus did the smoke change, and thus did Geeche Manito-ah labor, till before him on the shore of the lake lay eleven images.

Said the Manito-ah: "These shall be the Ancestral Animals, for from them shall arise all other animals."

These were the eleven Ancestral Animals: Grandfather Fox; Grandfather Eagle; Grandfather Bear; Grandfather Crow; Grandfather Rabbit; Grandfather Fish; Grandmother Beaver; Grandfather Antelope; Grandmother Partridge; Grandfather Muskrat; Grandfather Turtle. And these are the totems of the Mes-quas.

The Manito-ah was pleased with his work, so he knelt down and breathed upon the figures of clay, to

give them life. But his breath was so fiercely hot that the figures of clay were set on fire. The forest, too, caught fire, and so hot grew the flames that the western sea crept away from the edge of the island.

Geeche Manito-ah wept, and a tear fell from his eye to the ground. So great was that tear that it spread over the whole island and the fire was quenched.

The Manito-ah looked about him. Naught was left of the green grass or the leaves or the brooks or the lakes.

The Manito-ah looked upon the figures of clay. They were burned black, but, look, one of them was alive. Yet it was without hair, and it had a shell, hard from the heat of the fire. This was Grandfather Turtle.

Geeche Manito-ah was pleased.

"Grandfather Turtle," said the Manito-ah, "you shall be grandfather of all the animals, for you are the oldest living one of them all."

"Let it be so," replied Grandfather Turtle. "But let us not stay here, for the forest is burned with fire, and we have nothing to eat."

"It is well," said Geeche Manito-ah.

Together they journeyed to the shore of the sea, the Manito-ah carrying in his arms the poor burned figures of clay. And, as they stood upon the beach and looked out over the blue-green sea, Grandfather Turtle began to grow larger and larger and his shell became broader and broader.

"Climb upon my back, Geeche Manito-ah," said he.

Geeche Manito-ah climbed upon Grandfather Turtle's back, with the ten figures of clay. Grandfather Turtle grew larger and larger, until, by and by, Geeche Manito-ah, sitting at the center of the top of the shell, could not see the edges.

Grandfather Turtle crawled slowly into the sea. Slowly, ever so slowly, he crawled through the waters. So tall was he that, while his feet went upon the bottom of the sea, the top of his shell was not wet with the water. So broad was his shell that Geeche Manito-ah saw not to its edge and knew not that Grandfather Turtle crawled through the sea.

Day after day they journeyed thus, and the Manito-ah was weary and slept. When he awoke, he smelt a smell as of brine, and, look, there was water all about him, for Grandfather Turtle was now in the deepest part of the sea. The figures of clay were all in the water.

By and by the waters began to go back toward the edge of Grandfather Turtle's shell. Soon Geeche Manito-ah could see no water at all. He looked at the figures of clay. They moved on the shell of Grandfather Turtle.

"The water has made them live," cried the good Manito-ah in his joy.

Now speedily Grandfather Turtle was smaller. Geeche Manito-ah saw beyond the edges of Grandfather Turtle's shell a land of sand and forest.

"Come with me," commanded the Manito-ah, and the Ancestral Animals followed him from the shell of Grandfather Turtle to the land.

And Grandfather Turtle was again his former size.

And through the passing of many summers and winters did Geeche Manito-ah and the Ancestral Animals abide in the land of sand and forest, the land where now dwell the Mes-qua-kies and the Pale-faces.

II. OF A GOLDEN-GLOWING BOAT, WHEREIN GEECHE MANITO-AH SAILS ACROSS THE SKY

Among the Ancestral Animals Grandmother Partridge was a maker of much medicine; yea, more medicine could she make than they all. On the banks of dark rivers she danced by night, and in the day-time she shrilled from the tops of pines and from the branches of low-sagging willows, contriving much magic.

One day, as thus she cried aloud, there came forth from the clear air a round boat, golden-glowing, and rested upon the earth. And speedily the grass whereon it rested was black, so bright and fiery was the boat. And all the other Ancestral Animals hid themselves in the forest.

But Grandmother Partridge called unto Geeche Manito-ah, and together they stood before the boat.

"Behold," said Grandmother Partridge, "by much medicine have I made this boat, and it is so, that, if you shall enter into it, it shall sail upward to the sky, and from it you shall look down upon the earth and upon the Ancestral Animals which you have made."

Geeche Manito-ah tried to enter into the boat. But his scalp-lock was long, and hung even over his eyes, so that, when he tried to enter into the boat, he stumbled and fell.

The Manito-ah was angry. Full wrathfully he pulled the scalp-lock from his head and flung it to the ground.

Lo, it was a snake, and glided hissing into the bushes.

"You shall be called Rain Serpent," cried Geeche Manito-ah to the snake, "for you shall dwell in a cave, and, when you put your head without the cave, you shall with your breath suck up the moisture of all clouds and all waters, and it shall not rain again until you draw your head within the cave and breathe forth water from your mouth."

So it is, even to this day, that when Rain Serpent wills, it rains; and, when he wills not, it rains not.

Geeche Manito-ah entered into the golden-glowing boat, and, behold, it sailed far into the heavens, until it was a round ball of yellow fire, high above the earth.

Every day Geeche Manito-ah sails from east to west across the sky in his golden-glowing boat, and every night he sails back from west to east beneath the earth. And Palefaces call the ball of fire that they see the sun, for they know not that it is the boat of Geeche Manito-ah.

III. OF A MIGHTY FLOOD, AND OF THE BUILDING OF A NEW EARTH

Sometimes, when Rain Serpent becomes angry,—for he is a maker of much medicine—he sends dark clouds into the sky, and Geeche Manito-ah can no longer look down upon the earth. But the good Manito-ah grows not wrathful, for in the long ago the medicine of Rain Serpent once saved the earth from destruction.

And this is the story of it.

One day Geeche Manito-ah sailed down from his home in the sky, and he brought his boat into a brown valley and sat him down to make arrows. Carefully and skilfully did he chip the flint, and arrow after arrow was laid on the ground beside him.

As thus he toiled, suddenly there passed by him a whirlwind of dust, and in the whirlwind was Grandfather Rabbit. The cloud of dust blinded Geeche Manito-ah; Grandfather Rabbit snatched the arrows as he sped past.

Grandfather Rabbit drew back the string of his bow. An arrow sang its way into Geeche Manito-ah's arm.

Geeche Manito-ah pulled the arrow out of his arm. Fire, instead of blood, came forth from the wound.

The fire kindled the dry brown grass. It spread through the valley. Geeche Manito-ah was fearful

lest the whole earth should be burned, even as was burned the island-forest in the western sea.

But, far away from the valley, Rain Serpent put his head without his cave and saw the flames as they spread over the earth. Rain Serpent drew his head within the cave, and water poured from his mouth, and by his medicine the sky was covered with black clouds, and rain fell fast upon the earth.

Meanwhile, as Geeche Manito-ah lay in the bottom of his boat, sick from his wound, his boat sailed with him, past the black clouds, up into the sky, and he saw not that it rained upon the earth.

But Grandmother Partridge saw how that it rained and ceased not, so she danced, and shrilled, and made much medicine. And, behold, a boat came forth from the air and rested upon the earth. And Grandmother Partridge gathered together the Ancestral Animals, and together they entered into the boat. Still it rained, and water poured over all the earth, so that there could be seen no trees nor hills nor even mountains, for the waters were over all. But the boat of Grandmother Partridge floated upon the waters.

Many days, many nights, it rained. But at last Rain Serpent put his head without his cave and sucked up the clouds; and the rain ceased falling. But Geeche Manito-ah still lay sick in the bottom of his boat, so that the boat no longer crossed the sky, and it gave neither heat nor light to the earth.

Fain were Grandmother Partridge and the other Ancestral Animals to dry up the waters.

Grandmother Partridge flew to the cave of Rain Serpent.

"Dry up the waters, I pray thee, Rain Serpent," she cried.

But Rain Serpent made no answer. And, when she had cried three times, and Rain Serpent answered not, she made an end of crying and flew back to her boat.

Grandmother Partridge spoke to Grandfather Fish: "Go down into the water, I pray you, and bring up some earth."

"Not so," replied Grandfather Fish; "for Grandfather Turtle knows more of the earth than I. I am of the water."

Grandmother Partridge spoke to Grandfather Turtle: "Go down into the water, I pray you, Grandfather Turtle, and bring up some earth."

"Not so," answered Grandfather Turtle; "for I fear lest I be caught in the mud and could not come up again through the waters."

Grandmother Partridge spoke to Grandfather Muskrat: "Go down into the water, I pray you, Grandfather Muskrat, and bring up some earth."

"Yea, Grandmother Partridge," said Grandfather Muskrat; and he dived down into the water.

Those in the boat looked down. By and by Grandfather Muskrat came slowly up. He had found no earth.

Again Grandfather Muskrat dived down into the water. Those in the boat looked down. By and by

Grandfather Muskrat came slowly up. He had found no earth.

Still once more he dived down into the water. Those in the boat waited, looking down. For a long time they waited. Finally Grandfather Muskrat came up slowly, very slowly, and on his nose was a tiny lump of mud. But he was dead, and his body floated on the waters, far beyond the reach of those in the boat.

Grandmother Partridge spoke to Grandfather Crow: "Fly out, I pray you, Grandfather Crow, and fetch Grandfather Muskrat to the boat."

"Yea, Grandmother Partridge," replied Grandfather Crow. And he flew out and pulled the body of Grandfather Muskrat over the water to the boat.

Grandmother Partridge took the mud from the nose of Grandfather Muskrat and laid it carefully in the boat. Then she danced in the boat and cried strange cries, making much medicine. So it was, that she danced all the day and all the night, and in the morning Grandfather Muskrat was alive through the medicine of Grandmother Partridge.

Then Grandmother Partridge and Grandfather Rabbit—for they both could make much medicine—set themselves to build a new land. They laid the lump of mud on the water, and it floated. Then they danced and cried strange cries, making much medicine. For many days they made medicine, and the mud began to spread over the waters. Still they made medicine, and still the mud spread over the waters.

And Geeche Manito-ah was well of his sickness; his boat again sailed from east to west across the sky; and the mud became dry, and trees and grass grew upon it. The Ancestral Animals made them new abiding places; but, as the island-forest of the western sea was better than the earth before Rain Serpent's flood, so was the earth before the flood better than the earth after the flood. Yea, to this day there is more water and less land than there was in the old time.

IV. OF THE MAKING OF THE FIRST MAN, AND HOW HE WAS CALLED MES-QUA-KIE, WHICH MEANS RED

Many times did the flowers bloom and the leaves fall while the Ancestral Animals lived in the world. Many times, too, did Geeche Manito-ah sail down from the sky in his golden-glowing boat to visit the animals which he had made.

Thus he came at evening one day, and he caused the boat to sail back again, that it might return from west to east under the earth, and that he might see it rise in the grey of the morning. All night the Manito-ah slept, but, rising early in the morning, he stood on the bank of a smoothly flowing river and looked eastward. And, as he looked, the glowing boat, which Palefaces call the sun, crept up slowly, not golden, but all rose-red through the rifts of a cloud of yellow-grey.

Pleased was Geeche Manito-ah.

"It is good," he said. "It is of a good color."

Then he looked down at the river. There, too, on the water, he saw the rose-red of the boat in the midst of the clouds of yellow-grey. For a long time he watched the rippling colors; then, when his eyes were tired of looking, he turned to the bank of the river. It was of clay, red also, but red like copper, not like the rose. Red, red, red,—the sun, the water,

the clay. Geeche Manito-ah smiled as he said softly: "It is good; yea, it is of a good color."

The Manito-ah knelt down and dipped his fingers in the river. His hands still moist, he grasped a lump of the copper-red clay. Round and round he moulded it, and kneaded it as the squaw kneads the corn cake for the warrior. Again he moistened his hands and took more clay and shaped it. The golden-glowing boat of the Manito-ah shone straight above him. It began to go down again. Still he labored. By and by the clay took the form of a man's body. Geeche Manito-ah took still more clay and made legs and feet, arms and hands. By this time the boat of the Manito-ah had begun its journey backward from west to east beneath the earth; but the western sky was still all red, and the river was aflame.

Geeche Manito-ah worked on. He took a small lump of clay, and very slowly, very carefully, he moulded it. When he had done thus until the moon shone silver in the black river, he laid the piece of clay upon the bank; it was a man's head, save that it had neither eyes nor hair. Mouth and nose and ears had it, but no eyes nor any hair. So, save for these things, Geeche Manito-ah had made of clay the figure of a man.

But, because eyes and hair were lacking, the Manito-ah was sore perplexed. He sat down upon the bank of the river. And, while his golden-glowing boat made seven journeys to and fro, Geeche Manito-ah did not stir, neither did he sleep. But, when his

boat rose all red for the eighth time, he started up and ran noiselessly across the far-stretching grey prairie. Seven days and seven nights he ran, and ceased not. But, when his boat rose all red for the eighth time, he came to the edge of a forest. Into the forest swiftly he ran, without tarrying. Through the thickly twined brambles and over the swamps he ran, and he made no more noise than the warrior makes when he steals across the prairie to seek his enemy.

When Geeche Manito-ah had gone thus for a long time, he came to a brook. And across the brook, on a branch of a low-hanging willow, sat a crow, with eyes that gleamed black even in the midst of its black feathers. The Manito-ah leaped across the stream.

"Give me an eye," he cried to the crow.

"Yea, Geeche Manito-ah," said the crow. And the crow plucked out an eye and gave it to the Manito-ah.

Geeche Manito-ah ran noiselessly on. Soon he came to another brook. On the far bank he saw a crow. He leaped across the stream.

"Give me an eye," he cried to the crow.

"Yea, Geeche Manito-ah," replied the crow. So he plucked out an eye and gave it to Geeche Manito-ah.

Still the Manito-ah hastened on. A day and a night he ran, and in the early morning of the second day he saw before him a bear, with fur black-glistening. The Manito-ah stopped.

"Give me of your skin," he cried to the bear.

"I will not." And the bear started toward Geeche Manito-ah.

But the Manito-ah drew back the string of his bow, and an arrow sang its way swiftly into the heart of the bear. With his sharp knife the Manito-ah took the skin of the bear. He threw the skin over his shoulder and started for the bank of the smoothly flowing river.

Noiselessly he ran, day after day, night after night, until he reached again the bank of the river.

Then Geeche Manito-ah took the figure of the man which he had made, and put in its face the eyes of the crows and on its head the bear's hair. When this was done, the black river was spattered with the white of the moon and the stars. And all night Geeche Manito-ah danced on the bank of the river and made medicine.

When the east began to redden, the Manito-ah ceased making medicine, and, lying down by the side of the figure of the man which he had made, he breathed upon it very, very softly, lest he set it on fire; and the figure was alive. Geeche Manito-ah rose and lifted the man to his feet. The man was copper-red, like the clay of which he was made.

"Mes-qua-kie, red!" cried the Manito-ah joyfully. "I have made the red man."

And the boat of Geeche Manito-ah crept up rose-red through the rifts of a cloud of yellow-grey, as on the day when the Manito-ah began his work.

Two Lyrics

By MAHLON LEONARD FISHER

OBIIT

I cannot think of you as dead,
Tho all is done, and all is said.
 You never dared to brave the dark,
 And, Darling, in the grave no spark

Lights up the gloom of All-Below.—
Who lulls you in the long night? . . . Oh,
 I cannot think of you as dead,
 Tho all is done, and all is said!

I HAD A DREAM

I had a dream of waking
 Into a perfect Dawn,
With lakes of pale light breaking
 Over a flowery lawn.

I woke—a dream the warning—
 To find the Day begun:
Her warm mouth was the Morning,
 Her dear look was the Sun!

Barbed Wire and Other Poems II

By EDWIN FORD PIPER

THE WELL

The brimming bucket at my mouth —

Coolness of water!

In all my veins the heat, the drouth,—

O, the well water!

I

WATER BARRELS

Within the lumber wagon by the well
The barrels stand, and little snowflakes drive
Across them while the pulley groans and creaks
As on the stubborn frozen rope, the wrists
Of the hauler lean till the bucket clears the curb.
He seizes the bail, and drags, and strains tiptoe
To reach above the barrel. Driblets wet
His garments through and stiffen into ice.
Seventy buckets and done! Cover the barrels.
Three miles of windy road! The nervous bays
Surge heavily on the bits, while numb hands ache
Holding them in lest jolting waste the water.

The driver walks. Meanwhile the pulley laboring
Over the fifty feet from bucket to bucket
Groans on in the snow to serve another hauler.
The upland wells will be deep, they are long a-dig-
ging;

So wagons rattle down with the empty water barrels,
And wagons creep heavily home with the barrels
sloshing.

Yes, I did hear. If, — if there came a fire?
Be still! To that no one but God can answer.

II

THE WINDMILL

Yes, July heat. You'll drink another dipper.
The old wheel creaks and strains. Give her good
breezes,

She spins around as pretty as a picture.
And it blows every day as if to keep
Our hundred barrel tank full to the brim.
Two hundred feet, and half the depth hard rock, sir.
Yes, dug. A sizable hole; you see that dirt pile.
A dollar for each foot down, and board and lodging;
He took his five months' wages, bought an eighty.
O yes, we lived here while the well was digging;
Each day for stock and house we hauled three barrels.

It grew a little stale, sucked up a wood taste;
Now this comes clear and cold from porous sand-
stone,
And on a hot day — there, the tank runs over.

III

THE WELL DIGGER

*"Spring up, O well;
Sing ye unto it:
The princes digged the well,
The nobles of the people digged it,
By the direction of the lawgivers
With their staves."*

Numbers XXI, 17, 18.

Jim surely did not look much like a prince;
As — owning no horse — he toiled with a sack of
flour

Six miles across the prairie to his soddy.
He stopped at our place, wiped the sweat away;
His Adam's apple shuttling as he held
The dipper long to his mouth while he sat stooped
In a big chair in the shadow of the house.
A tall, thin, wiry man with rusty beard,
Flat nose, and scrawny brows over hollow eyes
Glinting with fire.

"Sonny, I dug this well."

"It's a good well, Jim."

"You bet she is, damn good!
My wells dug end on end would make a mile."

"Did you like digging?"

"No, I won't say like.

Paid me when pay was scarce. Too much stone-grit;

Bad for the lungs. They lower pretty slow
So that the rope won't spin you on the walls.
You look up, see a silver dime of the sky
Crossed by the windlass. You don't know the sky
Till you see her from a well hole. And your voice
Answers the tender with a boomin' sound
As if from seventy barrels. If he kicks
Some grains of gravel, stings you worse'n hail
At a hundred feet."

"Anything ever fall?"

"Yes, yes. I was a diggin' Blakesley's well.
I hunch myself up closer than the most,
And make a hole that's only three foot ten
'Stead of four feet. It saves a heap o' dirt.
Down ninety foot, his brother tendin' me.
We used a nail keg with a bail of wire;
I filled it with small stone, he drawed it up
Most of the way. I heard a kind of swish,
Looked, saw her comin'. Yes, the wire had broke —
Got bent wrong, snapped. Kebunk, kebunk, ke-
bunk,
She hit first one then tother side. I stood
Flat to the wall in no time, and kewhiz,
The nail keg took my shirt a glancing blow.
Buttons and cloth and hide went. Good I'm thin.

I fell on the bucket in a shower of stones.
No, didn't feel 'em, didn't know a thing.
My breast was black for three weeks. 'N' I said
then,
'I work hereafter where I've room to dodge;
I don't want all hell a-fallin' on my head
Without a hole to run to.' Then they got
A drill machine 'bout seven miles below.
It drills 'em. 'N' I quit. My wife was after me
To quit before."

"Jim, tell me what you thought
When you saw her comin'."

"Think? There wasn't time.
I thought, if she hits she makes a pancake of me.
Thin, to the wall!"

"Was that the only time?"

"I must be movin'! Another dipper, sonny."

"But weren't you often afraid the rope might
break?"

"No, hardly ever. Your mind is on your work.
Once a week, maybe, it would come to me,
If she caves,—good-bye. Yes, once she caved.

"My gosh!
I got to travel. Thank you, that's good water—
Some other time, boy. Home by noon. Good-bye."

BREAKING SOD

The level field of gray-green buffalo grass
Still narrows as the sweating bays plod on,
And that black ribbon at the ploughtail rolls
Beside its drier neighbor. Clevis gear
And doubletree complain while the plough sings,
Shearing through grass roots, burying weed and
flower,
Unhousing worm and grub for eager beaks,
The blackbird and the meadow-lark that flit
To the heels of the ploughman.

Never any more
Shall wild flock pasture here on grasses wild;
But bearded wheat shall flourish, corn shall ear,
The weeds shall burr and blossom, strong battalions.
And man shall serve the land in hunger and sorrow,
Worship and love the bounteous, old earth-mother,
Rejoicing in the furrows of his field.

THE SOD HOUSE

The hoof-beats sound, the harness clacks and clinks,
The wagon rattles in the frosty air
Along the level prairie road that swings
To the low, dark bulk whereon the sodded roof
Bristles with meager, winter-beaten weeds.
Before it, ranks of whip-like trees stand guard;
Behind lie cribs, straw sheds, the well, the woodpile,
And the garden square fenced in by a gooseberry
hedge

From weathering stalks and stubble. The house
front

Shows but two windows and one deep-set door.
How plain the lines of old gray grass that check
Layer from layer all the mud-brown wall
Though rain, and wind, and sun, and frost have
crumbled

The edges from the sods. A visitor
May pass the gable to lift the home-made latch
Of the lean-to kitchen buttressing the rear.

What warmth! How smooth and clean the earthen
floor!

The low room shines with kitchen-gear in order.
The living room is curtained. Smooth, bright
boards

O'erlie the dressed log rafters; braided rugs
Bless the pine floor, and homely chairs draw near
To table, stove, and bookshelf. Last and best,
Within the windows' deep recesses, flowers,
Wax plant, geranium, fuchsia, and oxalis,
Full-blossomed spite of every wintry wind.

THE DROUGHT

The light of noon comes reddened from a sky
A-blur with dust; the irritable wind
Burns on your check, and leans against your garments

Like a hot iron. Cloud after cloud, the dust
Sweeps the road, rattles on the dirty canvas
Of the schooner so dispiritedly drawn
By drooping horses. On the whitening grass,
With bright and helpless eyes, a meadow-lark
Sits open-beaked, and desperately mute.
The thin, brown wheat that was too short to cut
Stands in the field; the feeble corn, breast high,
Shows yellowed leaf and tassel. With slack line
The bearded, gaunt, stoop-shouldered driver sits
As if in sleep some mounting wave of sorrow
Had overpassed him, and he still dreamed on.
Within the schooner children's voices wail;
A mother's tones bring quiet. The sun glares,
The wind drones and makes dirty all the sky.
The horses scarcely fight the vicious flies.

This is departure, but there are who stay.

THE FORD AT THE RIVER

Through thin, gray, moving clouds a summer sun
Lies like dull silver on the rippled stream.
Now gusts alarm, now quiet stills the leaves
That shade the steep bank where the wagon presses
The shrinking team to splash in belly deep.
The wagon sways, a breeze tugs at our hats,
And the clear water, clutching near our feet
The wheel-spokes, spins on into roilly flurries.
Our hearts beat fast. It deepens now, and strikes
The tongue, the tugs, the box-floor, spurts up in
The lurching wagon, as over hidden hole
And treacherous dip we venture. The box lifts,
The current drags, the horses well nigh swim,
We speak not, scarcely breathe.

It shallows fast;
The horses' knees splash out and in, we near
The gravel bar, the water lets us go;
We drip across bright sand to the weedy road
Under the singing leaves, still looking back
To the dull silver water, and the minutes
Vibrant with beatings of the heart.

A bridge
Echoes to dry-shod feet, but in the fordway
Man grapples still the spirit of the stream.

THE PRAIRIE FIRE

O, the red tongues! The leavings of the fire!

Red sunshine in October's smoky air
With all dry grasses rustling in the breeze
Where fireguards saved them. But most fields and
hills
Lie black, and one can smell and taste burned grass.

Grim landscape, grim as death! Leavings of fire!
Wild things to whom the grass was as a forest
Woven with saving colors, naked, famishing,
Face sharp-eyed foes. Next season's bud is
scorched,
Her butterfly roasted. Only the green-lobed cactus,
Cooked to pale yellow, writhes half dead.

Red sunshine!

'Twas yesterday a pillar of leaning smoke
Surprised us, speeding from the north. Men hurried
With water and wet cloth for beating flames;
And at the furrows kindled wavering lines
Of backfire that must eat against the wind
To meet the blaze racing through delicate grass
A-flash like tinder. But where bluestem grew
The flame rose yards, and the counter-fire leaped
Whirling, and their red wings embracing lifted them
Into the roaring smoke.

O, the red leaping!

Jack-rabbits aimlessly scurried, the while enormous
Tumbleweeds ablaze came rolling, rolling, rolling
Over the widest guards.

O, the red sunshine!

Wreckage and ashes where wheat ricks clustered
ready,
With the threshing machine among them. That
mound was a barn;
The straw heaped over poles flared up like a torch;
A youth rushed in to rescue his horse, but the creature
Wild-eyed with stupor and terror kept leaping and
cowering.
We heard his voice ring out from the roar of the red
tongues.
Ashes covered their bones.

The leavings of fire!

The smile in his eyes, the laughter, the soft, boyish
mouth —

Yesterday's sunshine!

The praise from his sweetheart, the tunes of the first
adoration

A-ripple, a-dance in his breast —

O, the leavings of fire!

